

China's Use of People's War Theory in the South China Sea

A Monograph

by

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Abstract

China's Use of People's War Theory in the South China Sea, by MAJ Calvin W. Taetzsch, US Army, 41 pages.

On August 3rd 2016, in response to the Permanent Court of Arbitration ruling against China's South China Sea claims, China warned the international community of its preparations for a "people's war at sea." Such recent statements underscore the significance of this study, and emphasize the importance of a thorough examination of China's employment of People's War Theory. This monograph uses a structured focused approach to a case study of the 2012 Scarborough Shoal standoff to answer six research questions. The first is, what does a "peoples war at sea" look like? The second, what elements of people's war theory are present within China's Military Strategy? The third, what is the relationship between China's military limitations and its pursuit of people's war theory in the South China Sea? The fourth, how does people's war theory achieve military effects in the South China Sea? The fifth, what is the relationship between international condemnation and China's use of people's war theory in the South China Sea? The sixth, what social, political, or economic triggers drive China's use of people's war theory?

This study argues through the employment of Mao's people's war theory in the South China Sea, China promotes nationalism which distracts from internal struggles, provides time for its military to grow, and circumvents international laws and countries which challenge their territorial claims in the South China Sea. Given China's success in employing a people's war theory, China will likely look for opportunities to expand the theory's application beyond the South China Sea. The results of this study may be utilized to refine the United States' and the international community's approach to deterring China's belligerence in the South China Sea, as well as lead to a further understanding China's future military strategy.

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Acronyms

CMS	China Maritime Surveillance
EEZ	Economic Exclusive Zone
FLEC	Fisheries and Law Enforcement Command
ITLOS	International Tribunal of the Law of the Sea
PLA	People's Liberation Army
PLAAF	People's Liberation Army Air Force
PLAN	People's Liberation Army Navy
UN	United Nations
UNCLOS	United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea

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Introduction

China's assertion of ownership of South China Sea threatens global shipping lanes and the natural resources of Southeast Asian countries. Their assertion of ownership stems from a dynastic period where sovereignty in the South China Sea was never exercised nor existed. Moreover, its claims conflict with many other countries in the region who abide by the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS). To counter China's military growth, Southeast Asian countries have turned to alliances among each other and the United States. China on the other hand, has slowly asserted itself the South China Sea through not only expanding its military, but through an aggressive campaign of utilizing its citizens by applying people's war theory.

China's claim to the South China Sea directly conflicts with the claims of Taiwan, Malaysia, Brunei, Indonesia, Philippines' and Vietnam. Although all these countries, in addition to China, are signatories to the UNCLOS, China's conflicting claims present problems of adjudication and enforcement for the United Nations (UN) and broader international community. Even though it remains a signatory, China refutes rulings by the UN on its claims to the South China Sea, and continues to operate without fear of UN or international retribution. In such cases as the Paracel Islands, China has used its position of military strength to forcefully grab land from weaker neighboring countries. To avoid direct military action, China uses its population to enhance its claims in the South China Sea, circumvent international law, and achieve military objectives without the explicit use of its military.

The purpose of this study is to examine the relationship between people's war theory and China's effectiveness in claiming sovereignty of the South China Sea. The situation within the South China Sea remains fluid as the international diplomacy efforts aimed at quelling tensions in the South China Sea occur on a daily basis, as Southeast Asian countries continue grow their militaries, and as the United States rebalances towards the Pacific. Despite these continuing actions outside of China's control, one can still make assertions as to the effectiveness of China's use of people's war

theory in the South China Sea. This paper argues through the employment of Mao's people's war theory in the South China Sea, China promotes nationalism which distracts from internal struggles, provides time for its military to grow, and circumvents international laws and countries which challenge their territorial claims in the South China Sea.

On August 3rd 2016, in response to the Permanent Court of Arbitration ruling against China's South China Sea claims, China warned the international community of its preparations for a "people's war at sea."¹ Such recent statements underscore the significance of this study, and emphasize the importance of a thorough examination of China's employment of people's war theory. The results of this study may be utilized to refine the United States' and the international community's approach to deterring China's belligerence in the South China Sea, as well as lead to a further understanding China's future military strategy.

Several key terms, will be used throughout this study to provide common understanding regarding the parameters of the South China Sea, international law, and elements of people's war theory. The nine-dashed line map, in Figure 1, is the map produced and distributed by China to the international community in 2009.² Figure 2 illustrates the UNCLOS maritime and airspace zones. Of significance, an Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) is an area of sea beyond and adjacent to the territorial sea; the outer limit of the EEZ cannot exceed 200 nautical miles from the territorial sea baseline.³ The Territorial Sea is an area of water not exceeding 12 nautical miles in width which is measured seaward from the territorial sea baseline.⁴ An Air Space Identification Zone (ADIZ) is a

¹ Jesse Johnson, "China Must Prepare for 'people's War at Sea,' Defense Chief Says," *The Japan Times Online*, accessed August 3, 2016, <http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2016/08/03/asia-pacific/china-must-prepare-peoples-war-sea-defense-chief-says/>.

² United States Department of State, "Limits on the Seas" (December 5, 2014), accessed 29 August, 2016, <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/234936.pdf>

³ United Nations, *United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea*, (December 10, 1982), accessed 29 August, 2016, http://www.un.org/depts/los/convention_agreements/texts/unclos/unclos_e.pdf

⁴ Ibid.

publicly-declared established in international airspace adjacent to a state's national airspace, in which aircraft must be prepared to submit to local air traffic control and provide aircraft identifiers for location before they cross into sovereign airspace.⁵ Sovereignty is defined as supreme authority within a territory.⁶

The term operational reach will be used to describe China's military modernization. Operational reach is defined as the distance and duration across which a joint force can successfully employ military capabilities.⁷

Regarding people's war theory, nationalism is defined as the attitude that the members of a nation have when they care about their identity as members of that nation, and the actions that the members of a nation take in seeking to achieve (or sustain) some form of political sovereignty.⁸ Lastly, the word "people" within people's war theory is defined as the citizens of China.

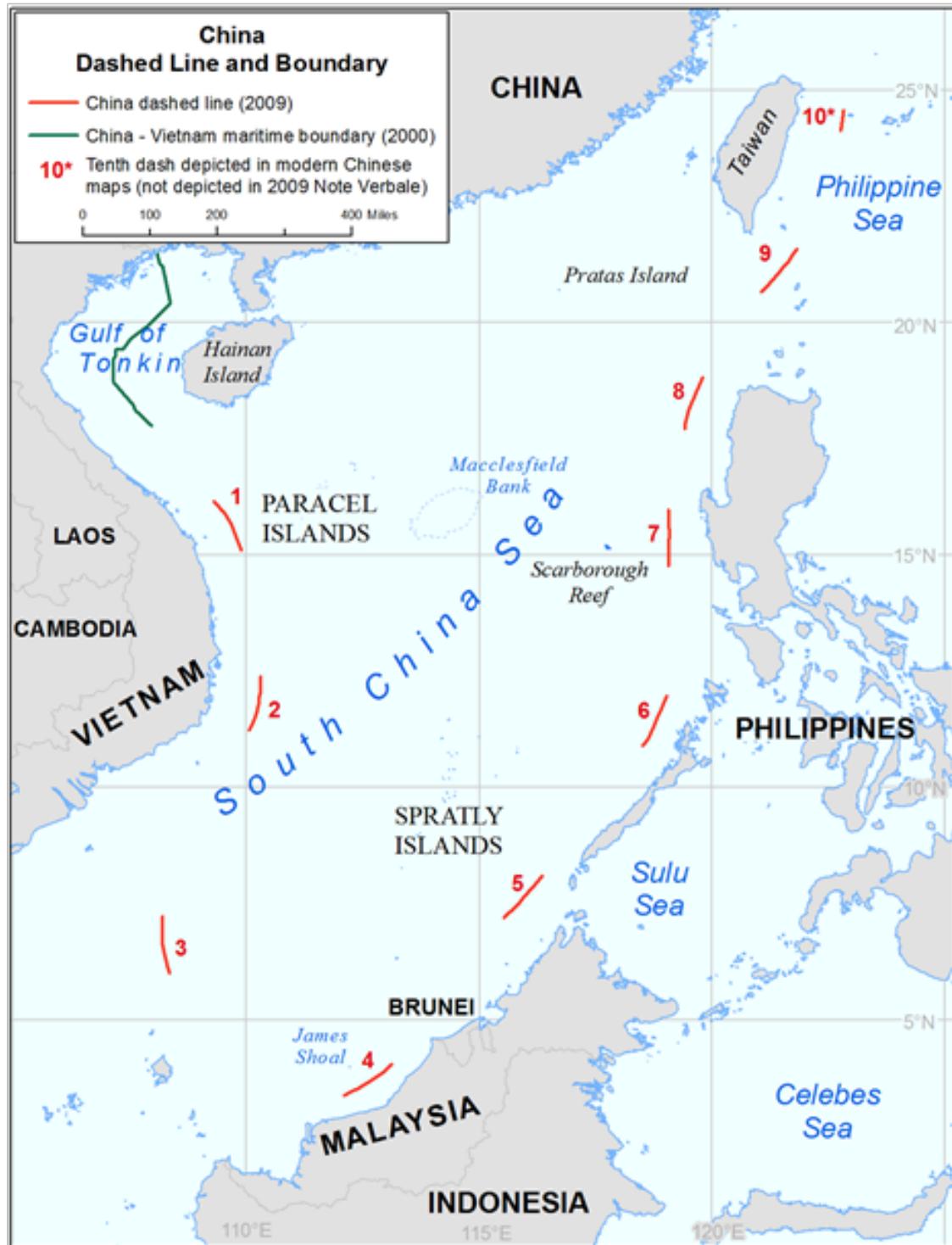
⁵ Kimberly Hsu, US-China Economic Security Review Commission, *Air Defense Identification Zone Intended to Provide China Greater Flexibility to Enforce East China Sea Claims* (January 14, 2014), accessed August 29, 2016, <http://www.uscc.gov/sites/default/files/Research/China%20ADIZ%20Staff%20Report.pdf>

⁶ Daniel Philpott, "Sovereignty," *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Summer 2016 Edition), edited by Edward N. Zalta, accessed August 29, 2016, <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/sovereignty/#1>.

⁷ Joint Publication (JP) 3-0, *Joint Operations* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2011), 4-5.

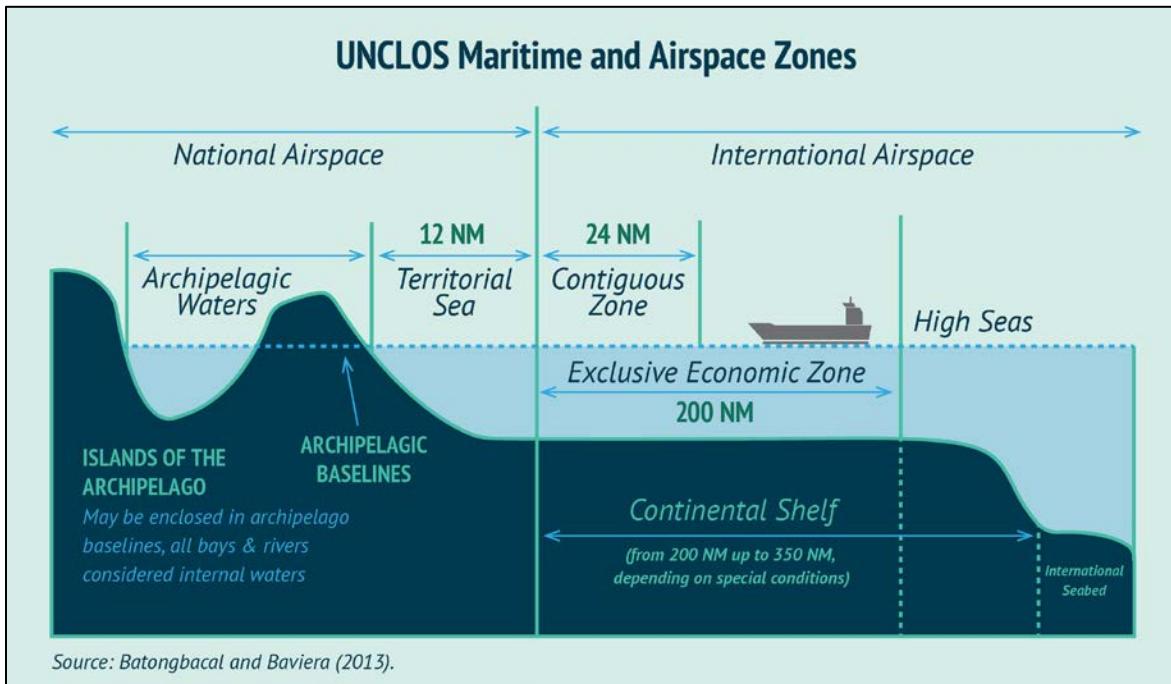
⁸ Nenad Miscevic, "Nationalism," *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Winter 2014 Edition), edited by Edward N. Zalta, accessed August 30, 2016, <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/nationalism/#BasConNat>.

Figure 1. China's 9-Dash Line Map



Source: United States Department of State, "Limits in the Seas," accessed August 29, 2016, <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/234936.pdf>

Figure 2. UNCLOS Maritime and Airspace Zones



Source: Batongbacal and Baviera, accessed August 29, 2016, <https://amti.csis.org/arbitration-101-philippines-v-china/>.

This study examines peoples war theory's application in the modern environment of the South China Sea. The theory originated in Mao's 1936 *On Protracted War* writings, regarding China's resistance against Imperial Japan. Mao viewed the people, as opposed to the formal army, as "the richest source of power to wage war."⁹ According to Mao, "man's conscious dynamic role" makes waging war and achieving victory possible. Key concepts within people's war theory, revolve around campaigns of organized nationalism, the full mobilization of the population, and firm patient resistance. Although Mao's writings on people's war theory were in the context of China facing a larger military, I will argue its application and benefits are not confined to this dynamic in the Chinese dominated South China Sea.

⁹ Mao Tse-tung, *On Protracted War* (Peking, China: Foreign Language Press, 1967), 186, accessed August 20, 2016. <http://www.marx2mao.com/PDFs/MaoSW2.pdf>.

Driving this study are four hypotheses. The first is, if China's military cannot advance its South China Sea ambitions, then China employs its population to provide time and space for its military to grow. The second is, if the international community increases diplomatic condemnation of China, then China turns toward people's war theory to mobilize and leverage its large population in order to gain positional strength over the international community. The third is, the more internal strife (economic, or social) within China, the more China attempts to unify its population (through employment of people's war theory) around their external ambitions in the South China Sea. The fourth is, China's position of military advantage over neighboring countries decreases their need to employ a people's war.

Six research questions are used to find the evidence to evaluate the hypotheses. The first is, what does a "peoples war at sea" look like? The second, what elements of people's war theory are present within China's Military Strategy? The third, what is the relationship between China's military limitations and its pursuit of people's war theory in the South China Sea? The fourth, how does people's war theory achieve military effects in the South China Sea? The fifth, what is the relationship between international condemnation and China's use of people's war theory in the South China Sea? The sixth, what social, political, or economic triggers drive China's use of people's war theory?

This study has the following limitations. First, this paper will be restricted to unclassified research as there are likely aspects or proof of people's war theory employment in the South China Sea that extend into the classified realm which this paper will not address or explore. Additionally, travel to the South China Sea or conducting interviews with citizens within China is not feasible, therefore this study will rely on secondary sources of information.

Within this monograph, delimitations were used to provide relevancy to the scope of study in order to draw reliable conclusions. Recognizing China's maritime disputes in such areas as the East China Sea and Senkaku Islands, this study is confined to case studies involving China's use of

people's war theory within the South China Sea. Moreover, understanding people's war theory's existence and practice over eighty years, this paper is limited to case studies from the conclusion of the Sino-Vietnamese War in 1979 to present day.

Two assumptions exist within this study. Regarding the relevancy of the study, the South China Sea will continue to remain of interest to the United States and the international community for the foreseeable future. Given the continued growth of shipping traffic transiting the South China Sea, this assumption appears safe. Regarding people's war theory, the possibility of forcible coercion by the communist Chinese government undermines the nationalistic intentions of Mao's idea of a people's war. Forcible coercion of the populace by the government is the government exerting power over the people, not leveraging or gaining its strength from the people. This study assumes a people's war consists of voluntary participants and not coerced through forcible means.

There are six sections to this study. Following the introduction, the second section, the literature review, covers Mao's writings and contemporary commentary on people's war theory. Additionally, the literature review examines several published works regarding the China's application of people's war theory in the South China Sea. The third section, the methodology, discusses the single structured focused approach and the research questions applied in this monograph. The fourth section, explores the 2012 Scarborough Reef case study. The fifth section presents the findings and analysis from the case study using the framework and methodology of section three. The final section concludes with a summary and recommendations for future research on topic of people's war theory in the South China Sea.

Literature Review

The literature review expands upon the theoretical framework of the introduction by further examining the background and key concepts of people's war theory. Mao's people's war theory provides the understanding necessary to examine the use of populations in concert or in place of militaries to achieve military objectives. Defining the distinction between citizen and military provides the foundation for examining the application of people's war theory. The mere deployment of a military consisting of armed citizens does necessarily not constitute a people's war. This examination of contemporary and historical literature show where the study will expand upon findings and contribute to a greater understanding of the application of people's war theory.

People's war theory is the theoretical construct used in this study. It originated from a collection of works (*On Protracted War*, *On Guerrilla Warfare*, *Problems of Strategy in China's Revolutionary War*, *Problems of Strategy in Guerrilla War Against Japan*), written by Mao between 1936 and 1938. At the time of Mao's writings on people's war theory, China wrestled with how to successfully oppose an invading Japan and wage a revolutionary war against the Nationalist party. The theory rests on two primary considerations, a standing government's material advantage over the Communist party, and the standing government's political weakness.¹⁰ Much of the theory originates from a strategically defensive approach, but it can manifest itself in operationally offensive actions to tip the scales in favor of the revolution. Understanding the context of Mao's people's war theory, this study uses the theory's concepts of mobilizing of the civilian population and employing the population to achieve military objectives to advance strategic policy.

Within *On Protracted War*, Mao emphasizes the importance of the mobilization of the population as a key component of people's war theory and guerrilla warfare. He states, "out of the

¹⁰ Gordon H. McCormick, "People's Wars" in *Encyclopedia of Conflicts since World War II. Volume 1: Afghanistan through Burundi*, 1999, edited by James Ciment (New York, NY: Routledge, 2006), 24, accessed August 29, 2016, <http://hdl.handle.net/10945/49166>.

millions of China's regular troops, it is absolutely necessary to assign at least several hundred thousand to disperse through all enemy-occupied areas, arouse the masses to arm themselves, and wage guerilla warfare in co-ordination with the masses.”¹¹ Of importance is the distinction Mao makes between a people’s war and guerilla warfare; a people’s war is an ideological subset of the broader context of guerilla warfare.¹² In both guerilla warfare and people’s war, the operational or strategic problem remains the same: “overcoming the conventional military superiority of the state through an asymmetrical campaign based on the support of a constituent population.”¹³ Understanding this distinction, Mao argues the success of a guerilla war is contingent upon the people’s war theory concept of mobilizing the population.

According to Mao, “mobilization of the common people throughout the country will create a vast sea in which to drown the enemy, [and] create the conditions that will make up for our inferiority in arms.”¹⁴ Informing the army and the population about the political aims of war allows both soldier and civilian to understand how the war will be fought and how they are an essential to creating a united front against a common adversary.¹⁵ Mao goes on to emphasize the need for continuous political mobilization throughout his “War of Resistance” through “leaflets and bulletins, by newspapers, books and pamphlets, through plays and films, through schools, [and] through the mass organizations and through our cadres.”¹⁶

In *Problems of Strategy in Guerilla War Against Japan*, Mao juxtaposes the concept of political mobilization with the concept of employing the population stating, “Apart from directly

¹¹ Mao Tse-Tung, *On Protracted War*, 173.

¹² McCormick, “People’s Wars,” 23.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Mao Tse-Tung, *On Protracted War*, 154.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

mobilizing the people to join the forces, increased numbers can be attained by amalgamating small units.”¹⁷ He Jianbin, head of the state-owned Baosha fishing corporation, provides an example of Mao’s concept of employing the population in a people’s war when he stated, “Vietnam seems like it will wage a ‘people’s war’...if we put 5,000 Chinese fishing boats in the South China Sea, there will be 10,000 fishermen. And if we make all of them militiamen, give them weapons we will have a military force stronger than all the combined forces of the countries in the South China Sea.”¹⁸ Throughout this study similar statements will be examined under Mao’s theoretical concept of population mobilization and employment.

Further in *Problems of Strategy in Guerilla War Against Japan*, Mao regards the employment of the population as essential to transforming guerilla units into regular units waging mobile warfare. He defines mobile warfare as “the policy of taking the offensive, seeking quick decisions and operating on exterior lines in campaigns and battles.”¹⁹ Furthermore, in the context of a China’s revolutionary war, he emphasizes the complementary relationship between the efforts of people’s guerillas and the Red Army against the Nationalist party. The use of guerilla warfare allows time and space for enemy military strengths to turn to weaknesses, and for revolutionary military weaknesses to turn to strengths.²⁰ Leveraging the population in guerilla warfare efforts, Mao argues, allows the communist party to overcome their material weaknesses. The concepts of mobilizing and employing the population to present a united front for China against a common

¹⁷ Mao Tse-tung, *Problems of Strategy In Guerilla War Against Japan* (Peking, China: Foreign Language Press, 1967), accessed October 1, 2016, https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/selected-works/volume-2/mswv2_08.htm.

¹⁸ Mark McDonald, “Will China Arm Its Fishermen to Protect a ‘Core Interest.’” *New York Times*, accessed October 1, 2016, http://rendezvous.blogs.nytimes.com/2012/09/12/will-china-arm-its-fishermen-to-protect-a-core-interest/?_r=1.

¹⁹ Mao Tse-tung, *Problems of Strategy In Guerilla War Against Japan*.

²⁰ McCormick, “People’s Wars,” 25.

adversary, and are key facets of people's war theory carried over to today's environment in the South China Sea.

Essential to this study is the delineation between an independent citizen acting as part of a broader Chinese military effort, and a citizen who is part of the Chinese military. This difference carries with it different rules of engagement and poses unique challenges for opposing countries. China's use of a "maritime militia," walks the fine line between citizen and official Chinese military member. The ambiguous nature of the Chinese maritime militia allows for a variety of definitions. For the purposes of this study, the Chinese maritime militia is a collection of commercial vessels, operated primarily by fishermen, uniquely equipped and trained to act on behalf of the Chinese Navy in limited roles such as, safeguarding coastal areas, enforcing economic exclusivity, and conducting reconnaissance. Additionally, this monograph adopts LTC Thomas C. Roberts' assertion made in his monograph that "participation in the militia—although ostensibly voluntary—is considered a citizen's 'glorious obligation.'"²¹ On the other hand, a Chinese military member is a citizen whose primary means of employment is through their military service.

James Kraska and Michael Monti published a study in 2015 titled "The Law of Naval Warfare and China's Maritime Militia," in which they argue that China's use of a maritime militia risks erasing the longstanding distinction between warships and civilian ships in the law of naval warfare.²² Kraska and Monti define the Chinese maritime militia as consisting of a distributed network of fishing vessels organized to support the People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN). They further identify the concept of people's war as the philosophical foundation of China's maritime

²¹ Thomas C. Roberts, "The Chinese People's Militia and the Doctrine of People's War" (Washington, DC: The National Defense University Press, 1983), 19.

²² James Kraska and Michael Monti, "The Law of Naval Warfare and China's Maritime Militia" (US Naval War College, RI: Stockton Center for the Study of International Law, 2015), 451, accessed August 29, 2016, <http://stockton.usnwc.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1406&context=ils>.

militia.²³ According to their research, militia's purpose is to conduct a "people's war at sea" by complicating the battlespace, degrading an opponent's decision making process and exposing an adversary to political dilemmas that will make them more cautious to act against China during a maritime crisis.²⁴

Similar to James Kraska and Michael Monti, Andrew Erickson and Conor Kennedy published an article titled "Meet the Chinese Maritime Militia Waging a 'People's War at Sea,'" in which they raise the question of "Who controls China's maritime militia?" They similarly define the Chinese maritime militia as force comprised of civilian fishing vessels filling a variety of roles, from using emergency response units to rescue stranded vessels to more assertive operations including conducting island landings to declare sovereignty.²⁵ The issue of understanding control of the maritime militia is important in this study because it assists in assigning responsibility for the actions of civilians. According to their research, multiple governmental agencies are responsible for the formation of the Chinese maritime militia, including the Fishery Law Enforcement Command, Maritime Safety Administration, Defense Transportation Administration, and the People's Armed Forces departments.²⁶ Although these agencies form and train the maritime militia, the privatized fishing industry within China plays a role in determining the size of the maritime militia in order to meet fluctuating economic demand. Regarding the size of the maritime militia they cite a *National Defense* article estimating almost 20,000 fishing vessels and "hundreds of thousands" of militia.²⁷ Their article concludes by raising the international concerns with dealing with "overtly-civilian

²³ Ibid., 455.

²⁴ Ibid., 451.

²⁵ Andrew S. Erickson and Conor M. Kennedy, "Meet the Chinese Maritime Militia Waging a 'People's War at Sea,'" *Wall Street Journal*, accessed October 1, 2016, <http://blogs.wsj.com/chinarealtime/2015/03/31/meet-the-chinese-maritime-militia-waging-a-peoples-war-at-sea/>.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid.

vessels serving military purposes,” and notes the increasing investments made by the Chinese government to militarize their maritime militia.

Contributing to the understanding of people’s war theory within the Chinese military, Alexander C. Huang examines the PLA Navy’s practice of a “people’s war at sea” between 1945 and 1999, and its relevance in today’s PLA Navy. Within the book, *Chinese Warfighting*, he argues much of China’s strategic and operational approach rests upon the ability of its ground forces to achieve their objectives. As a result, the PLA Navy lags behind China’s Army in funding and modernization, however he asserts China successfully supplemented their navy through employing people’s war theory. He also argues China’s success in executing a “people’s war at sea” relies upon featured tactics of concentration and local superiority, deception and surprise, and maneuver and mobility.²⁸

Additionally, Alexander C. Huang examines two schools of thought regarding the concept of a “people’s war at sea.” The first school of thought centers around the idea that China’s naval modernization reduces the need for the practice of a people’s war theory and a reliance upon a maritime militia. The opposite school of thought acknowledges the military advancements since the birth of Mao’s of People’s War Theory, but argues that China’s leaders have always adapted Mao’s theories to apply to modern conditions and the true spirit of people’s war rests in the theory’s defensive characteristics. He concludes his comparison of the two schools of thought by stating, “as long as China remains engaged in protecting claims at sea, Peoples War Theory will never die.”²⁹

In 1983, LTC Thomas C. Roberts, published a monograph for the National Defense University titled *The Chinese People’s Militia and the Doctrine of People’s War*, in which he studies the use of militia in China’s strategy for the defense of their frontiers between 1973 and

²⁸ Alexander C. Huang, “The PLA Navy at War 1949-1999,” *Chinese Warfighting*, edited by Mark A. Ryan, David M. Finkelstien, and Michael A. McDevitt (New York, NY: Routledge, 2003), 264.

²⁹ Ibid.

1981. Of note, Roberts does not narrowly apply people's war theory to the maritime domain, as such, he defines the people's militia as "a nationwide civilian mass organization of politically reliable and physically fit men and women under the dual leadership of the Chinese Communist Party and the Peoples Liberation Army (PLA).³⁰ At the time of Robert's monograph China had recently concluded their war with Vietnam, and was undergoing major shifts to defense strategy in order to modernize away from traditional Maoist doctrine. The role of people's war theory and the use of militia was of much debate within China as Deng Xiaoping sought to improve the professionalism of militia through increased training and significantly modernize the PLA. Robert's study of the evolution of people's war theory within China's defensive strategy forebodes many the recent events in the South China Sea.

This monograph seeks to expand upon Thomas Robert's research regarding China's use of people's war theory between 1973 and 1981. China's navy has significantly advanced since Roberts' research, but there appears an assumption among current literature that China will continue to apply people's war theory to advance their claims in the South China Sea. Does China's position of military advantage over neighboring countries increase or decrease their need to apply people's war theory?

³⁰ Roberts, "The Chinese People's Militia and the Doctrine of People's War," 15.

Methodology

The overall aim of this study is to understand China's application of people's war theory in the South China Sea. The study requires a thorough analysis of China's actions over an extended period of time to impose sovereignty on a defined geographical location. Merely examining a single event or point in time does not allow for a greater understanding of whether China's use of people's war theory contributes to strategic goals. The purpose of this section is to describe the methodology used to analyze China's application of people's war theory. The section is broken into the four parts: the methodology and introduction to the case study, research questions guiding the study, data collection methods, and discussion data analysis.

This monograph will employ a structured focused approach to a single case study in order to answer the six research questions. Under this approach, the researcher constructs several questions to reflect the research objective in order to standardize data collection and allow for an adequate accumulation of findings.³¹ The examination of a single case study allows sufficient time and focus to analyze the six research questions, as opposed to using a structured focused comparison of two case studies.

The events leading up to and following the 2012 Scarborough Shoal standoff between the Philippines and China provide sufficient data and context to evaluate China's use of people's war theory in obtaining strategic goals. What began as a minor conflict between fishermen of different countries developed, over the course of roughly 15 years, into a full blown military conflict between the Chinese and Philippine navies. The lasting effects and lessons learned from China's use of people's war theory in the Scarborough Shoal apply to many current conflicts in the South China Sea.

³¹ Alexander L. George and Andrew Bennett, *Case Studies and Theory Development in the Social Sciences* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University, 2005), 67.

The following questions, reflect the theoretical approach, enable the understanding of China's application of people's war theory in the South China Sea, and allow for the testing of hypotheses:

1. What does a “people’s war at sea” look like? Establishing what a “people’s war at sea” looks like illuminates distinguishing characteristics between a people’s war and a conventional military conflict. The expected finding is that a people’s war at sea resembles civilian vessels operating in concert with conventional military as part of a larger military strategy.
2. What elements of people’s war theory are present within China’s military strategy? Identifying the elements of people’s war theory within China’s military strategy allow for focused examination into the reasons why people’s war theory accomplishes strategic objectives over other military theories. The theory’s core concept of using the power of the people to bring victory, is present within China’s military strategy in order to connect the will of the people to the China’s military aspirations in the South China Sea.
3. What is the relationship between China’s military limitations and its pursuit of people’s war theory in the South China Sea? Understanding the relationship between military limitations and the pursuit of people’s war theory will assist in determining the scope and role of people’s war theory in Chinese strategy. The expected finding is that China’s limitations are augmented by application of people’s war theory.
4. How does people’s war theory achieve military effects in the South China Sea? Discovering the military effects of people’s war theory exposes the theory’s limitations and strengths when applied in military strategy. People’s war theory circumvents international laws and allows the Chinese government to establish conditions where the military can “lawfully” intervene to defend its population.

5. What is the relationship between international condemnation and China's use of people's war theory in the South China Sea? Finding a correlation between international community's responses to China's aggressive South China Sea actions, and China's use of people's war theory assists in predicting how China will adapt people's war theory to meet future international challenges and circumvent international laws. China's use of people's war theory corresponds with the increased condemnation in the international community.

6. What social, political, or economic triggers drive China's use of people's war theory? Understanding that people's war theory is contingent upon the participation of a civilian population, the study of domestic policies and problems within China reveals the challenges of gaining the popular civil support necessary for successful application of people's war theory. As necessary, in order to rally its population behind its aspirations in the South China Sea, China fabricates or coerces social, political, and economic conditions.

Given the numerous international implications surrounding the sovereignty of the South China Sea, there exists a wealth of literature analyzing recent and past incidents between China and its neighbors, and the veracity of conflicting claims. To answer research questions, the monograph will rely heavily on the expressed opinions or assessments of governmental agencies, militaries, and departments. Additionally, professional field studies and corroborated newspaper articles will be used to understand the evolving situation in the South China Sea.

Although any statement emanating from China is filtered through the Chinese government, this monograph considers such statements as sanctioned by the Chinese government. Corroboration of Chinese statements and reports from China will lead to an overall understanding of official Chinese policies and directed actions. News reports outside of China will be corroborated against other news agencies in the region and will be compared to boarder international news outlets. The

study will also examine the publications of subject matter experts with the understanding of their respective approaches to their work.

This section outlined the single structured focused approach, the research questions guiding the study, the data collection methods, and discussed data analysis. This methodology allows for a disciplined study of the events leading up to and following the 2012 Scarborough Shoal standoff, and creates conditions necessary to better understand China's application of people's war theory.

Case Study

This section provides an overview of the selected case study in order to evaluate the proposed hypotheses. Within the South China Sea, the events leading up to and including the 2012 Scarborough Shoal standoff provide strategic context for analysis of China's use of people's war theory. This section provides an overview of the selected case study, focused questions, and analysis of the case study. The overview of the case study provides the context and necessary information relevant to the proposed hypotheses. The focused question section details the evidence found within the case study that support the answer reached to each question. The analysis section evaluates the evidence of each focused question and whether the outcomes support the proposed hypotheses.

2012 Scarborough Shoal Standoff

The Scarborough Shoal is a triangle shaped shoal consisting of 150 square kilometers of barren reefs and rocky islets approximately 135 miles from the Philippines and 543 miles from China.³² Understanding its distance from the Philippines, the Philippine government formally claimed the Scarborough Shoal as part of its 200-mile Economic Exclusive zone in 1978.³³ On the other hand, China's claim to the Scarborough Shoal rests upon the historical claims of the Yuan Dynasty of the 1200s, and China's 9-dashed line map encompassing the majority of the South

³² Renato Cruz De Castro, "China's Realpolitik Approach in the South China Sea Dispute: The Case of the 2012 Scarborough Shoal Standoff" (paper presented for the "Managing Tensions in the South China Sea" Conference, Washington, DC, June 5-6, 2013), 3, accessed August 30, 2016. <http://yaleglobal.yale.edu/content/standoff-south-china-sea>.

³³ Renato Cruz De Castro, "The 2012 Scarborough Shoal Stand-Off," *The South China Sea Maritime Dispute*, edited by Leszek Buszynski and Christopher B. Roberts (New York, NY: Routledge, 2014), 112, accessed August 28, 2016. https://www.academia.edu/9374847/_The_2012_Scarborough_Shoeal_Stand-Off_from_Stalemate_to_esclataion_of_the_South_China_Sea_dispute_.

China Sea.³⁴ Although on July 12th 2016, the International Tribunal in the Hague ruled in favor of the Philippines' claim to the Scarborough Shoal, as of October 25th 2016, China's Coast Guard controls access of Filipino fisherman into the Shoal.³⁵

The events of the 1990s and leading up to the Scarborough Shoal standoff, which began on April 8th 2012 and ended in mid-June 2012, explain how China has advanced its position to the point of controlling access to the Scarborough Shoal. Prior to the Scarborough Shoal standoff, the Philippine Navy controlled access to the Scarborough Shoal. As an example of their control, in 1965 the Philippine Navy constructed an iron tower at the entrance to the Scarborough Shoal lagoon.³⁶ Moreover, between 1997 and 2002 the Philippine Navy made numerous detentions of Chinese fishermen in and around the Scarborough Shoal. The exact numbers are not known, but as a reference, in 2002 the Philippine Government formally announced the detention of 122 Chinese fishermen between January and May of that year.³⁷

Throughout the 1990s and the early 2000s relations between China and the Philippines remained mostly peaceful with Philippine sovereignty of the Scarborough Shoal unchallenged militarily. In 1995 both China and the Philippines signed a code of conduct vowing to resolve the dispute of the Scarborough Shoal through peaceful means.³⁸ Although repeated Philippine detentions of Chinese fishermen resulted in strained diplomatic relations between the two countries,

³⁴ Daniel Wagner, Edsel Tupaz and Ira Paulo Puzon, "China, the Philippines, and the South China Sea," *Huffington Post*, accessed November 1, 2016, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/daniel-wagner/china-the-philippines-and_b_1531623.html

³⁵ James Hookway, "Rodrigo Duterte's China Overtures Appear to Bear Fruit in South China Sea," *Wall Street Journal*, accessed October 28, 2016, <http://www.wsj.com/articles/rodrigo-dutertes-china-overtures-appear-to-bear-fruit-in-south-china-sea-1477661023>.

³⁶ Minerva Generalao, ed., *The Scarborough Files: A Primer on the Panatag Shoals* (Philippine Daily Inquirer, Inc., 2012).

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid.

China continued to seek the release of its fishermen through diplomatic and non-military means. In a September 2002, China was even grateful to the Philippine navy's rescuing of Chinese fishermen in adverse sea conditions.³⁹ Moreover, in March 2001, the Chinese ambassador went as far as to apologize to the Philippine government for the increasing number of Chinese fishermen in the area and even acknowledged difficulties controlling the fishermen.⁴⁰

Tensions began to rise between China and the Philippines between 2002 and 2012 as China reflected a double-digit increase in defense spending and began to significantly modernize its navy, through advancements in destroyers, frigates and nuclear attack submarines.⁴¹ As a result of its advancements in its navy, China comfortably extended their operational reach from the first island chain running from Japan to the Philippines to the second island chain which extends from the Japan to the Northern Mariana Islands, Guam, and further south to Palau.⁴²

Through exercising the new operational reach of their navy, China bolstered their regional military prowess and threatened many weaker countries in the Asia-Pacific. In addition to China's increased military prowess, China shifted to a more robust stance on their claims to the South China Sea. In June 2011, in response to the Philippine Navy's discovery of Chinese structures within 200 nautical miles of Philippines, China told the Philippines to "stop harming China's military sovereignty and maritime rights and interests."⁴³ To meet and deter the growing Chinese threat, the Philippines and other regional countries increased their participation in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), and increased military ties to the United States through military exercises.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ De Castro, "China's Realpolitik Approach in the South China Sea Dispute: The Case of the 2012 Scarborough Shoal Standoff," 2.

⁴¹ De Castro, "The 2012 Scarborough Shoal Stand-Off," 114.

⁴² Ibid., 115.

⁴³ Ibid., 116.

Throughout the 1990s and early 2000s, tensions between the Philippines and China set the collision course that resulted in the 2012 Scarborough Shoal standoff. The standoff began on April 8th 2012 when Philippine reconnaissance aircraft spotted eight Chinese fishing vessels in Scarborough Shoal. In response, the Philippine coast guard deployed the BRP Gregorio Del Pilar, a purchased US Coast Guard cutter, and tasked it with protecting the marine environment and resources and asserting sovereignty of the Philippines.⁴⁴ Unlike previous detentions of Chinese fishing vessels, two Chinese marine surveillance vessels blocked the Philippine coast guard and informed the captain of the BRP Gregorio that he had strayed into Chinese territorial waters.⁴⁵ In order to deescalate the situation, the Philippines replaced the BRP Gregorio with a smaller coastguard vessel, however China augmented their footprint with the Yuzheng-310, which was significantly larger and armed with machine guns, light cannons and advanced technology.⁴⁶ On April 15th, the Chinese ordered the Philippines to remove their coast guard vessel from the Shoal, but the Philippines continued to refuse as the standoff continued into the diplomatic channels. The Philippines filed a diplomatic protest for the harassment of one of their research vessels, MV Sarangani, in the Scarborough Shoal area, and dared China to take their claims to the International Tribunal of the Law of the Sea (ITLOS). China rejected this approach in favor of bilateral negotiations.⁴⁷ On May 9th, China added ten fishing vessels and four Chinese surveillance ships to their footprint in the Scarborough Shoal. In addition to increasing their civilian and military footprint, China increased economic pressures on the Philippines through bans on imported

⁴⁴ Ibid., 118.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ De Castro, “China’s Realpolitik Approach in the South China Sea Dispute: The Case of the 2012 Scarborough Shoal Standoff,” 4.

bananas, and the cancellation of tourist flights to the Philippines.⁴⁸ The standoff concluded in mid-June with the onset of the typhoon season as both the Philippines on 16th June and China on June 18th ordered all their vessels to return to port.⁴⁹ Both countries continue to claim sovereignty over the Scarborough Shoal today, however, the Philippines no longer control the area as they did before the standoff.

The first question is what does a “people’s war at sea” look like? Answering the question, a people’s war at sea resembles the military working in concert with the populace while avoiding direct coordination so as to claim plausible deniability on the international stage. Within the case study, Chinese fishermen repeatedly violated the Philippines EEZ encompassing the Scarborough Shoal. In most of these violations the Philippine navy did not detain or board the vessels out of suspicion of Chinese fishermen performing overt military duties. Most of the detentions centered around Philippine confiscation of coral and fish that Chinese fisherman had taken from Scarborough Shoal.⁵⁰ Although fishermen did not appear to officially represent the Chinese government they did perform some nationalistic actions, such as the hoisting of a Chinese flag and setting water markers in April 1997.⁵¹

Regarding the coordination between the Chinese government and the fishermen, the government tacitly encouraged the repeated violations of its fishermen prior to the 2012 standoff. In May of 1999, the Philippines formally asked China to respect the Philippine sovereignty of the Scarborough Shoal. In the same month, China imposed a two-month fishing ban on all its vessels in the South China Sea.⁵² This restriction was nothing more than a formality for the Chinese

⁴⁸ Ibid., 7.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 9.

⁵⁰ Generalao, *The Scarborough Files*.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Ibid.

Government, and represents China's control over its population as Philippine detentions of Chinese fishermen resumed in early 2000. In fact, China would refute the claim of their control over the fishing population in March 2001, when the ambassador apologized to the Philippine government for the increasing number of Chinese fishermen in the area and acknowledged difficulties controlling the fishermen.⁵³

The use of Chinese fishermen to impinge upon Philippine territorial waters gave the Chinese navy cause for interdiction in the Scarborough Shoal. In addition to attempting to simply exert territorial sovereignty, China's coast guard forces entered the 2012 standoff with the purposes of protecting its population. For this reason, the people of China were directly used to give cause for military intervention. Although China refuted its direct control over its population, China uses their military to capitalize on the opportunities the populace provides. This leveraging of the power of the people by the government is in line with people's war theory.

The second structured focused question was what elements of people's war theory are present within China's military strategy? China's 2012 defense white paper declares "China's overall national strength has grown dramatically and the Chinese people's lives have been remarkably improved."⁵⁴ Although China identifies the existing regional peace they state the world is "far from being tranquil" and see increased regional economic competition, power politics, and interventionism, as threats to the development and modernization efforts of China.⁵⁵ Establishing the people as a source of national strength and connecting regional threats to the lives of its

⁵³ De Castro, "China's Realpolitik Approach in the South China Sea Dispute: The Case of the 2012 Scarborough Shoal Standoff," 2.

⁵⁴ Ministry of National Defense The People's Republic of China, *The Diversified Employment of China's Armed Forces (2012 White Paper)* (April 2013), accessed November 26, 2016, <http://eng.mod.gov.cn/Database/WhitePapers/2012.htm>.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

population, China uses people's war theory and rallies its population to action in its military strategy.

In discussing its armed forces, China makes direct reference to people's war within the 2012 China defense white paper, but vaguely expounds on the employment of a people's war waged by its militia. "Safeguarding national sovereignty, security and territorial integrity, and supporting the country's peaceful development," are the goals of China's 2012 national defense strategy implemented by its armed forces.⁵⁶ In addition to advancing civilian-military development, enhancing the quality of national defense mobilization and reserve force building, the white paper describes China's armed forces as "constantly [bringing] forward new ideas for the strategies and tactics of people's war."⁵⁷ Such a reference to people's war, presupposes the implementation of people's war theory within its armed forces in 2012.

In addition to the PLA, PLAN, and PLAAF, the 2012 China white paper states its militia "play a significant role in China's overall strategies of security and development, and shoulder the glorious mission and sacred duty of safeguarding national sovereignty, security and development interests."⁵⁸ Considering its defined broader role as part of China's armed forces, the 2012 white paper vaguely describes the composition of the militia as "an armed organization composed of the people not released from their regular work."⁵⁹ The role of the militia is to be "an assistant and backup force of the PLA," and is "tasked with participating in the socialist modernization drive, performing combat readiness support and defensive operations, helping maintain social order and participating in emergency rescue and disaster relief operations."⁶⁰ Of note the white paper

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

describes the 2012 focus of the militia as “focusing on optimizing size and structure, improving its weaponry and equipment, and pushing forward reforms in training so as to enhance its capabilities of supporting diversified military operations.”⁶¹ China displays an adoption of people’s war theory, by vaguely defining its militia force of civilian workers, and giving them a specified task within its 2012 defense white paper.

The third structured focused question was what is the relationship between China’s military limitations and its pursuit of people’s war theory in the South China Sea? China’s use of people’s war theory allows time for China to make necessary military improvements, and supplements their military limitations. In the 1990s and early 2000s China’s surface fleet consisted largely of fast attack craft armed with torpedoes and missiles designed for close range battle, and their larger ships were aging destroyers and frigates.⁶² In addition to their aging fleet, Philippine modernization efforts added to the Chinese urgency to modernize. Of note, the Philippine coast guard vessel deployed to Scarborough Shoal, BRP Gergorio Del Pilar, represented the newest and most advanced addition to their coast guard fleet in 2011.⁶³ To upgrade their aging fleet and modernize their military, China’s defense budget more than doubled from 45 billion to 106.4 billion between 2007 and 2012.⁶⁴ The increased budget brought about the modernizations of its China’s navy and coast guard. For clarification, in March 2013 China passed legislation reconstituting the State

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Dean Cheng, “China’s Pivot to the Sea: The Modernizing PLA Navy,” *Heritage Foundation*, accessed November 16, 2016, <http://www.heritage.org/research/reports/2015/12/chinas-pivot-to-the-sea-the-modernizing-pla-navy>.

⁶³ Robert Johnson, “This Philippine Warship Is In A Dangerous Standoff With China,” *Business Insider*, accessed November 26, 2016, <http://www.businessinsider.com/the-philippines-newest-warship-is-in-a-standoff-with-two-chinese-ships-in-the-south-china-sea-2012-4>.

⁶⁴ Military Periscope, “China,” accessed November 16, 2016, <https://www.militaryperiscope.com.lumen.cgscarl.com/nations/asia/china/organzn/index.html>.

Oceanic Administration and established the official China Coast Guard Bureau, which integrated the responsibilities of the following agencies: China Marine Surveillance (CMS), Border Defense Coast Guard, the China Fisheries and Law Enforcement Command (FLEC), Border Defense Coast Guard, Marine Anti-Smuggling Police.⁶⁵ The Yuzheng-310 which was deployed to the Scarborough Shoal in 2012, was the newest CMS vessel in their fleet. Built in 2010 the 2,580 ton Yuzheng-310 dwarfs the coast guard vessels of neighboring countries, and is armed with machine guns, light cannons and advanced communications.⁶⁶ Throughout the 1990s and 2000s, while China operated with an aging fleet, the repeated detentions of Chinese fishermen in the Scarborough Shoal never prompted a response from any of the pre-2013 Chinese coast guard commands. However, once China's modernized their fleet with vessels such as the Yuzheng-310, China extended their operational reach and no longer needed fishermen to refute Philippine territorial claims on Scarborough Shoal.

Supplementing their coast guard capabilities, between 2000 and 2012 China's motorized fishing fleet grew from 487, 297 to 695,555 vessels. Moreover, between 2010 and 2012 its marine fishing vessels decreased from 204, 456 to 193, 327, but its overall marine vessel tonnage increased by roughly 500,000 tons.⁶⁷ Growth of this nature suggests Chinese fishing vessels became more robust to increase independent operations and extend duration time afloat. The growth in Chinese marine fishing vessels corresponds with the increased military budget and modernization efforts of

⁶⁵ Ryan D. Martinson, "From Words to Actions: The Creation of the China Coast Guard" (paper presented for the China as a "Maritime Power" Conference, Arlington, VA, July 28-29, 2015), 33, accessed November 24, 2016, https://www.cna.org/cna_files/pdf/creation-china-coast-guard.pdf.

⁶⁶ Robert Beckhusen, "China's New South China Sea Weapon: Super Coast Guard Ships," *National Interest*, accessed on November 21 2016, <http://nationalinterest.org/blog/the-buzz/chinas-new-south-china-sea-weapon-super-coast-guard-ships-16428>.

⁶⁷ Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, *World Review of Fisheries and Aquaculture*, 36, accessed November 23, 2016, <http://www.fao.org/3/a-i3720e/i3720e01.pdf>.

China between 2000 and 2012. Additionally, the creation of the FLEC in 2000⁶⁸ significantly increased government control over the Chinese civilian fishing fleet, supplementing the growing size of their coast guard fleet.

The fourth structured focused question asked how does people's war theory achieve military effects in the South China Sea? China employed people's war theory to achieve military effects through exercising command and control of its civilian population, equipping its fishing fleet to conduct reconnaissance, and conducting sustainment. Throughout the 2012 Scarborough Shoal stand-off, the CMS and FLEC provided daily command and control of all Chinese vessels, while the PLA Navy maintained a deliberate distance away from the immediate vicinity of the shoal.⁶⁹ The command and control structure of these two commands provided guidance and direction to civilian fishing vessels which previously lacked any command or relational hierarchy.

Many of the ships operated by Chinese fishermen after 2006 benefitted from a Ministry of Agriculture program which equipped Chinese fishing vessels with satellite navigations and communications hardware.⁷⁰ These improvements increased the responsiveness of fishing vessels and enabled them to collect information on the size and disposition of foreign vessels operating in Chinese claimed waters.⁷¹ The increased responsiveness enabled by communications improvements, is evident within the case study. Without knowing the exact communications between the Chinese fishing vessels at the shoal and the CMS command, one can reasonably assume the fishing vessels conducted reconnaissance for the CMS and FLEC. On April 8th 2012, the Philippine air force reported no CMS forces accompanying the eight Chinese fishing vessels,

⁶⁸ Martinson, "From Words to Actions: The Creation of the China Coast Guard", 19.

⁶⁹ Anthony H. Cordesman, Ashley Hess, and Nicholas S. Yarosh, *Chinese Military Modernization and Force Development: A Western Perspective* (Center for Strategic & International Studies, 2013), 4761.

⁷⁰ Martinson, "From Words to Actions: The Creation of the China Coast Guard" 20.

⁷¹ Ibid.

and on 10 April the BRP Gregorio Del Pilar attempted to apprehend the fishing vessels before the two CMS vessels intervened.⁷² At some point after the Philippine air force flew overhead, the Chinese fishing vessels must have reported the possibility of Philippine intervention to CMS command. The rapid responsiveness of the two CMS vessels to place themselves exactly between the Chinese fishing vessels and the approaching BRP Gregorio, suggest the Chinese fishing vessels reported on the location, direction, speed of approach, and disposition of the advancing Philippine coast guard.

The events at Scarborough Shoal since 2012 show how the maritime militia achieve military results through performing sustainment functions. One year after the 2012 stand-off, President Xi Jinping visited members of the maritime militia in the Tanmen fishing town of Qionghai City and stated “the maritime militia members should not only lead fishing activities, but also collect information and support the construction of islands and reefs”⁷³ In September 2016, the Philippine Defense Minister accused Chinese fishing vessels off Scarborough Shoal of performing dredging operations and of being possibly equipped with cable-laying machinery.⁷⁴ Granted the accusations were based off disputed aerial photographs and images, a Chinese precedent exists where fishing vessels have been observed executing similar reclamation functions at other disputed

⁷²De Castro, “The 2012 Scarborough Shoal Stand-Off,” 118.

⁷³ Zhang Hongzhou, “China’s Fishing Industry: Current Status, Government Policies, and Future Prospects” (paper presented for the China as a “Maritime Power” conference, Arlington, VA, July 28-29, 2015), 24, https://www.cna.org/cna_files/pdf/China-Fishing-Industry.pdf.

⁷⁴ Jane Perlez, “New Chinese Vessels Seen Near Disputed Reef in South China Sea,” *New York Times*, accessed September 5, 2016, <http://www.nytimes.com/2016/09/05/world/asia/south-china-sea-philippines-scarborough-shoal.html>.

locations in the South China Sea. These rudimentary sustainment functions performed by the Chinese fishermen, set the conditions for full militarization and control of the disputed territory.⁷⁵

The fifth structured focused question asked what is the relationship between international condemnation and China's use of people's war theory in the South China Sea? China uses people's war theory to advance their disputed claims in the South China Sea to avoid receiving significant international condemnation. Prior to Mao's formalization of people's war theory, the Chinese Government Land and Water Maps Inspection Committee issued a map in April 1935 delineating the entire South China Sea as its possession and its "living places of the Chinese fishermen."⁷⁶ Such publications of maps in 1935 and the 2009 9-dashed line map (in intro), represent Chinese efforts to seek international legitimacy of their South China Sea claims. Carried over to the 2012 case of the Scarborough Shoal standoff, China avoided international condemnation by employing its fishermen in a campaign to advance its claims of possession of the South China Sea.

In May 2000, four years after China became a signatory to UNCLOS, China created the FLEC under the Ministry of Agriculture.⁷⁷ In 2006, the same year China reaffirmed their declaration of UNCLOS, the FLEC began a program to equip Chinese fishing vessels with advanced satellite navigation and communications hardware.⁷⁸ In 2010, two years prior to the Scarborough Shoal stand-off, the FLEC implemented a convoy system for its fishing fleets.⁷⁹ The

⁷⁵ Simon Denyer, "How China's Fishermen Are Fighting a Covert War in the South China Sea," *Washington Post*, accessed November 16, 2016, https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/asia_pacific/fishing-fleet-puts-china-on-collision-course-with-neighbors-in-south-china-sea/2016/04/12/8a6a9e3c-fff3-11e5-8bb1-f124a43f84dc_story.html.

⁷⁶ CDR USN Fones James M., *China 1- United States and Its Allies 0: How the United States and Its Allies Are Losing the South China Sea* (CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2016), 107.

⁷⁷ Martinson, "From Words to Actions: The Creation of the China Coast Guard," 19.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 21.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

establishment of the FLEC, increased the Chinese government's control over its civilian fishing population, and allowed it to circumvent international law. On June 28, 2012, He Jianbin, Chief of the state-run Baosha Fishing Corp, underscored China's view of its civilian fishing population when he stated, "If we put 5,000 Chinese fishing boats in the South China Sea there will be 100,000 fishermen, and if we make all of them militiamen, give them weapons, we will have a military force stronger than all the combined forces of all the countries in the South China Sea."⁸⁰

International condemnation of China's deployment of fishermen to the Scarborough Shoal did not occur to a significant degree until China formally deployed its maritime surveillance forces. While the Philippines frequently condemned the actions of Chinese fishermen and the subsequent responses of the Chinese government throughout the 1990s and early 2000s, they did not seek to involve the international community in resolving their disputes with Chinese fishermen. On the other hand, once China deployed its maritime surveillance vessels to assert its sovereignty and protect its fishermen, the roles of China and the Philippines reversed. The Philippines sought the help of the international community through filing a formal notification on 22 January 2013 to the UN for arbitration, and China preferred to deal with the Philippines bilaterally. In October 2012, three months before the Philippines' formal notification, Chinese Vice Foreign Minister Fu Ying warned Manila not to do the following "(1) appeal to the UN; (2) internationalize the dispute in forums such as the ASEAN; (3) coordinate with other countries such as the US; and (4) issue any press release regarding the negotiations."⁸¹

In July 2016, The Hague Arbitration Court ruled Scarborough Shoal lay within the Philippines Exclusive Economic Zone and that both China and the Philippines possessed

⁸⁰ Mcdonald, "Will China Arm Its Fishermen to Protect a 'Core Interest.'"

⁸¹ De Castro, "The 2012 Scarborough Shoal Stand-Off," 124.

“traditional fishing rights” to the shoal.⁸² In response to this international condemnation, China rejected the court’s ruling and continues to keep the Philippine fishermen out of the shoal through the use of its coast guard and maritime militia. The use of the “maritime militia” allow China to have a degree of plausible deniability that its coast guard and navy do not have.⁸³

The sixth structured focused question was what social, political, or economic triggers drive China’s use of people’s war theory? Economic pressures within China’s fishing industry drive China’s use of people’s war theory. To meet the increasing domestic demand for fish products, supply imbalance of fishery products, and to provide work for its fishermen the Chinese government encourages distant water fishing.⁸⁴ In June 2013 China’s vice premier, Wang Yang, spoke at the “National Tele-conference on Efforts to Develop a Modern Fishing Industry, in which he expounded on the importance of fishing China’s vast marine territories to meet the challenges of the rising demand for food and of the scarcity of land and water resources.⁸⁵ As China’s inshore fishing resources have steadily depleted, China has shifted focus toward off-shore (encompassing the South China Sea) and distant water fishing (beyond South China Sea and in the sea areas under jurisdiction of other countries).⁸⁶ The decline in fishing resources has brought about steady growth of the aquaculture sector of China. According to the China Fisheries 2014 Yearbook, in 1978 aquaculture accounted for 26.11 percent and catch accounted for 73.89 percent of fish production, by 2013 those figures reversed with 73.58 percent aquaculture and 26.42 percent catch.⁸⁷ This shift

⁸² Steven Stashwick Diplomat The, “Crying Wolf? Contrary to Reports, No Dredges at Scarborough Shoal Yet,” *The Diplomat*, accessed November 16, 2016, <http://thediplomat.com/2016/09/crying-wolf-contrary-to-reports-no-dredges-at-scarborough-shoal-yet/>.

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Hongzhou, “China’s Fishing Industry: Current Status, Government Policies, and Future Prospects,” 23.

⁸⁵ Ibid., 27.

⁸⁶ Ibid., 8.

⁸⁷ Ibid., 7.

in fish production and the steady decline in inshore fishing resources, has placed strain on China's estimated traditional fishing workforce of 7.1 million people.⁸⁸

In November 2012, China's Ministry of Agriculture published, "Opinion on Promoting Sustainable and Healthy Development of Distant-water Fishing" which argues that the "Marine fishery resources are a precious source of wealth for human society...will be beneficial to mitigating China's per capita resource deficit."⁸⁹ Furthermore, the Ministry of Agriculture argues the distant water fishing plays a crucial role in "strengthening China's status and influence within relevant international territories, and consolidating and deepening China's amicable and cooperative relationship with relevant countries; and it holds important strategic significance."⁹⁰ Published statements such as these prove the Chinese government's concern for the economic growth fishing industry and advocacy for fishing as a remedy. Moreover, the Chinese government appeals to its population by tying its marine fishery resources to their wealth.

⁸⁸ Ibid., 5.

⁸⁹ Office of United States Trade Representative, "Request From The United States to China Pursuant to Article 25.10 of the Agreement" (April 15, 2016), 9, accessed November 9, 2016, <https://ustr.gov/sites/default/files/US-submission-Chinese-fishery-subsidy-measures.pdf>.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

Findings and Analysis

This section summarizes the findings of the six structured focused questions in order to assist in answering the four-proposed hypothesis. There are four portions to this section: the introduction, findings, analysis, and summary. The findings portion provides a summary of each of the six structured focused questions answered through an examination of the 2012 Scarborough Shoal standoff. The analysis portion examines the validity of the four-proposed hypotheses after considering the findings of the six structured focused questions.

Findings

The first question was what does a “people’s war at sea” look like? From the case study a “peoples war at sea” resembles the military working in concert and leveraging the civilian populace while avoiding the perception of cooperation or coordination of efforts. Answering what a “people’s war at sea” looks like allows for greater understanding of the employment of its population in China’s military strategy.

The second question was what elements of people’s war theory are present within China’s military strategy? China’s 2012 military strategy establishes the people as a source of national strength, emphasizes the importance of the military in advancing new strategies and tactics of people’s war theory, and identifies a civilian militia force as responsible for safeguarding national sovereignty. Identifying the elements of people’s war theory within China’s military strategy prove China’s continued use and relevance of Mao’s theory.

The third question was what is the relationship between China’s military limitations and its pursuit of people’s war theory in the South China Sea? China used of people’s war theory to allow time for their military to modernize and expand their operational reach. Additionally, China used the theory to supplement military limitations. China’s reliance on people’s war theory indicates their awareness of military limitations and signals to the region their military weaknesses in obtaining operational reach.

The fourth question was how does people's war theory achieve military effects in the South China Sea? China used people's war theory to achieve military effects through providing command and control of its civilian fishing population, and equipping their fishing fleet to conduct reconnaissance and sustainment operations on behalf of its military. This use of people's war theory to achieve military effects blurs the lines for neighboring countries; Chinese civilians engaged in military activities force regional militaries into uneasy scenarios when confronting a Chinese civilian population.

The fifth question was, what is the relationship between international condemnation and China's use of people's war theory in the South China Sea? China used people's war theory to circumvent international attention prior to the Scarborough Shoal stand-off; then China used the theory to provide international justification for China's impingement of Philippine sovereignty. This finding shows how China can exploit their regional hegemony and continue to violate international laws in future territorial disputes.

The final questions asked, what social, political, or economic triggers drive China's use of people's war theory? China used internal economic pressures within the fishing industry to rally its traditional fishing population around national aspirations for territorial gains in the South China Sea. Identifying the economic pressures within the fishing populations allow for the development of a more holistic approach which incorporates economic factors to counter China's expansion in the South China Sea.

Analysis

The first hypothesis states that if China's military cannot advance its South China Sea ambitions, then China employs its population to provide time and space for its military to grow. The evidence suggests support for this hypothesis. Recognizing their need for military growth yet still desiring to advance their territorial goals in the South China Sea, China chose to provide the command structure necessary to organize their fishing fleet to still meet their military strategic

objectives in the South China Sea. Once China's military sufficiently modernized and extended their operational reach, they employed its modernized force in their military plan to protect newly claimed territory.

The second hypothesis states that if the international community increases diplomatic condemnation of China, then China turns toward people's war theory to mobilize and leverage its large population to gain positional strength over the international community. The evidence suggest support for this hypothesis. China continuously claimed plausible deniability to the Philippines as they deployed fishermen to the Scarborough Shoal in the years leading up to the stand-off. After the international community condemned China's 2012 actions, China deliberately kept and rotated fishermen on the shoal to provide justification for the intervention of their coast guard. China's Fisheries and Law Enforcement Command (FLEC), established shortly after becoming a signatory to UNCLOS, became the primary vehicle for gaining a position of advantage over the international community.

The third hypothesis states the more internal strife (economic, or social) within China, the more China attempts to unify its population (through employment of people's war theory) around their external ambitions in the South China Sea. The evidence suggest support for this hypothesis. China leveraged the growing economic weakness of its traditional fishing industry to promote nationalism and encourage fishermen to fish beyond internationally recognized territorial waters. Without economic distress, China would have had difficulty rallying fisherman around its government's territorial desires in the South China Sea.

The fourth hypothesis states that if China's position of military advantage over neighboring countries decreases, their need to employ a people's war also decreases. There is insufficient evidence to support this hypothesis. While China's military continues to modernize, and extend their operational reach, China uses the people's war theory to continually expand territorial claims and provide justification to employ their military to protect their civilian population.

This section provided a structured focused approach to the finding and analysis of the 2012 Scarborough Shoal stand-off case study. A review of the findings of the six structured questions allowed the reader to understand the major evidence found within the case study. The findings and analysis section suggested support for the first three hypotheses and insufficient evidence for the fourth hypothesis. The next section provides a summary of the research and its implications for military planners and policymakers regarding China's use of people's war theory in the South China Sea.

Conclusion

The purpose of this research was to examine the relationship between people's war theory and China's effectiveness in claiming sovereignty of the South China Sea. This paper argues through the employment of Mao's people's war theory in the South China Sea, China promotes nationalism which distracts from internal struggles, provides time for its military to grow, and circumvents international laws and countries which challenge their territorial claims in the South China Sea.

The study contributes to the existing body of work on China's historical use of people's war theory in obtaining national objectives and can assist in developing policies to counter China's effective use of people's war theory. Although China has a history of employing people's war theory, this research examined the utility of the theory in the modern environment of the South China Sea. The 2012 Scarborough Shoal stand-off provided a sufficient case study to answer the six structured focused questions and test the four hypotheses regarding the China's use of people's war in the South China Sea. The findings of case study, guided by the six structured focused questions, sufficiently proved evidence supporting three hypotheses: first, if China's military cannot advance its South China Sea ambitions, then it employs its population to provide time and space for its military to grow; second, if the international community increases diplomatic condemnation of China, then China turns toward people's war theory to mobilize and leverage its population to gain positional strength over the international community; third, the more economic strife within China, the more China attempts to unify its population (through employment of people's war theory) around their external ambitions in the South China Sea.

The utility of people's war theory will not go away even though militaries and technologies continue to advance at a rapid pace. The insufficient evidence for the fourth hypothesis, that China will rely less upon people's war theory as its military modernizes, shows the enduring concern for China's employment of people's war theory. While the theory is useful in

providing time for its military to grow, detracting from internal strife, and circumventing international laws, it is equally useful in providing justification for flexing its improved military power on behalf of its citizens. Moreover, as Mao argues, “the richest source of power to wage war lies in the masses of people,”⁹¹ not in the strength of a military technology.

To counter China’s continued use of people’s war theory to advance its South China Sea claims, the international community and regional militaries cannot merely attempt to resist and match the rapid modernization of Chinese Coast Guard or PLAN. Moreover, diplomatically decrying the building of artificial islands, is not likely to change Chinese behavior. Chinese behavior grows out of their ability to convince and leverage their population to engage in a people’s war.

A fifty-year old captain of a fishing trawler in the port of Tanmen, illustrates the depth of China’s successful people’s war campaign. When a reporter interviewed him on his trawler, the reporter took notice of the prominent Mao Zedong portrait displayed behind him, and the expensive satellite navigation system supplied by the Chinese government. Questioned about his incursions into the disputed Spratly Islands, the captain stated “It is our water, but if we don’t fish there, how can we claim it is our territory.”⁹² This fishing captain represents one of thousands of fishermen who deploy their fishing ships to the disputed territories in the South China Sea.

While the international community attempts to limit or match China’s military expansion, fishermen will continue to deploy their fishing boats to disputed territories until they are stopped by the Chinese government or the international community. Given the importance of the role of people’s war theory in advancing its South China Sea claims, China will continue to encourage and support its civilian fishing population. Therefore, the responsibility to curb the influence of

⁹¹ Mao Tse-tung, *On Protracted War*,186.

⁹² Denyer, “How China’s Fishermen Are Fighting a Covert War in the South China Sea.”

people's war theory and stop these fishermen, rests upon those countries with interests in the South China Sea.

This research shows the success of China's use of people's war theory, but did not explore or find reasons for the failure of people's war theory. People's war theory grew out of China's resistance to a larger military force and the theory continues to be successful today given China's regional military dominance, but this is not to argue for the theory's immunity. The failure of people's war theory rests in the words of Clausewitz, "Since war is not an act of senseless passion but is controlled by its political object, the value of this object must determine the sacrifices to be made for it in magnitude and also in duration. Once the expenditure of effort exceeds the value of the object, the object must be renounced and peace must follow."⁹³ Applied to the South China Sea, China's people's war will be forced to conclude when the sacrifices of its civilian fishing population are too great for the sought-after territories in the South China Sea. Right now, beyond periodic detentions and extended travel times, Chinese fishermen have sacrificed little to fish in more prosperous waters and assist China in claiming the South China Sea.

Some fear the conclusion or failure of a people's war may lead to a more conventional war in the South China Sea in which China's modernized military makes the sacrifices its civilian fishing population is not willing to make. Given China's recent response to the July 12, 2016 international tribunal ruling at the Permanent Court of Arbitration, against China's South China Sea claims, it appears China favors the use of people's war theory over a more conventional military approach. One month after the ruling, Chinese Defense Minister Chang Wanquan urged for increased preparations for a "people's war at sea" to "safeguard sovereignty."⁹⁴ Recent, quotes such

⁹³ Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, trans. Michael Eliot Howard, ed. Peter Paret (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1989), 92.

⁹⁴ Johnson, "China Must Prepare for 'people's War at Sea,' Defense Chief Says."

as these show the enduring influence of Mao's people's war theory on China's current strategy in the South China Sea.

Given the numerous global shipping lanes and booming industrial production emanating from Southeast Asia, the South China Sea's strategic importance will endure for the foreseeable future. While a people's war through its fishing population has proven effective, should fishermen tire of making sacrifices, a more likely scenario exists where China merely shifts the application of its people's war theory to a different sector of the civilian population, instead of turning to a more conventional war to advance its territorial claims. As a result of the successful mobilization of its fishing population to advance its claims in the South China Sea, in future scenarios extending from the Line of Control to Russia and the Korean Peninsula, China will likely look to employ people's war theory to detract from internal struggles, allow time for its military to grow, and circumvent international laws.

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